

Bighorn National Forest Plan Revision

Welcome to the Plan Revision from Forest Supervisor Bill Bass

Special points of interest:

- Involvement of the landowners of the National Forests is critical to successful management of the Bighorn National Forest.
- An initial round of public meetings has been scheduled, see page 3—Please join us!
- There will be many additional opportunities for participation, including meetings, field trips, and Forest Service people are available to visit with your group or organization.

The Bighorn National Forest is about to begin revision of the Forest Plan, and we would like to invite you, the landowners of the National Forests, to be involved and to participate in this process. The Forest Plan went into effect in 1985, and Revision will identify needed changes in the current Plan.

National Forests are managed for multiple use, which includes, among other things, recreation and wilderness opportunities, timber and rangeland utilization and management, wildlife habitat management, and maintaining clean water. The Forest Plan provides overall management direction for these resources, and “zones” the Forest into areas where different uses may occur. Other Forest Plan revision decisions include establishing multiple use goals and objectives, establishing the amount of timber to be harvested, whether or not to make additional Wilderness recommendations, and establishing monitoring requirements.

There are 270 million people that “own” the Bighorn National Forest. Some of us are fortunate enough to live in the shadow of “the mountain”, and we take our children and friends there to camp, explore, and just smell the mountain air. Some of our neighbors depend on the natural resources of the mountain for their livelihood, such as harvesting timber and providing services for travelers; some follow in their grandparent’s footsteps of trailing cattle up the mountain every summer. Others who care about and use the Bighorn National Forest live further away, and their voices will be heard also.

You have charged those of us working for the Forest Service with being the facilitators of this land planning process. Our goal is to facilitate a process that people can readily participate in and understand. (Continued on page 2)

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Welcome to the Plan Revision, continued

This is the first in a continuing series of newsletters that will explain Forest Plan Revision and how you can participate. Future columns will explore what Forest Plan Revision is, and some will provide scientific information showing the tradeoffs in taking different paths. Your neighbors in your community will be contributing letters to the editor and editorials concerning Forest Plan issues. Please consider the variety of opinions expressed, as they will indicate the wide variety of National Forest landowner opinions.

Besides the newsletters, there will be field trips, open houses, public meetings, and a Forest Plan website where information is always available. (Go to: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn>, click on "Forest Plan" under the electronic reading room.) As always, you are welcome to drop in the Forest Service offices in Sheridan, Buffalo, Worland, or Lovell. Please call your local office if your group or organization would like a Forest employee to visit with you about the Forest Plan Revision process.

As you are well aware, the owners of the Bighorn National Forest have a diverse set of opinions about how the Forest should be managed. Many of these feelings are deeply held, and for some people, they are close to the core of their being. Our expectations cannot be a plan that everyone agrees to wholeheartedly. Rather, our objective is to engage you, the landowners, in a way that your opinions and information is heard, and that you get a chance to hear your neighbors' opinion as well. That in the end, the majority of the landowners of the Bighorn National Forest will think, "You know, I may not have selected that exact alternative, but after considering the scientific information, and considering my neighbors' opinions as to what it means, I understand why that path was chosen."

"Our goal is to facilitate a process that people can readily participate in and understand."

Bill Bass

Forest Supervisor



Public Meetings Scheduled!

This table shows when meetings are scheduled in the near future. Of course, your input is welcome at any time, in the forms of visits, phone calls, or asking a Forest Service person to one of your group's meetings, but these meetings are designed to encourage discussion and interaction. The meeting format is called "collaborative learning", and allows for people to learn from each other with a series of activities and dialog. Information on the Forest Plan revision can also be found at the Forest Plan website, at www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/elec_rr.htm#fp

Town	Date	Open House	Meeting Time	Location
Worland	11/13	5 to 6 pm	6 to 8 pm	Conference Building, Fairgrounds 602 Fifteen Mile Road
Sheridan	11/27	5 to 6 pm	6 to 8 pm	Holiday Inn Convention Center 1809 Sugarland Drive
Buffalo	12/4	5 to 6 pm	6 to 8 pm	Colonel Bozemans 655 E. Hart Street, US Hwy 16
Gillette	12/5	5 to 6 pm	6 to 8 pm	Clarion Western Plaza 2009 S. Douglas Highway
Greybull		To be determined		The Greybull meeting will probably be during the week of 1/9 to 1/12.
Lovell	1/8/01	5 to 6 pm	6 to 8 pm	Lovell Fire Hall 314 Nevada Ave.

The meeting format provides an opportunity for people to learn from each other about Forest Plan revision issues.

Partnership for a Better Revision

The local County Commissioners and Conservation Districts are helping with the Bighorn Forest Plan revision. The counties included are Big Horn, Johnson, Sheridan, and Washakie. The Conservation Districts are the six that are in the four counties listed: Lake DeSmet (Buffalo), Powder River (Kaycee), Sheridan County, Shoshone (Lovell), South Big Horn (Greybull), and Washakie County. The Commissioners and Conservation Districts have been especially instrumental to date in designing an effective and meaningful public participation process, and work on this is continuing.

Stay tuned for further details concerning this important and exciting partnership!

Notice of Intent Published: Comments Wanted!

The Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan, which is the first step in the formal revision process, was published in the Federal Register on November 10, 1999. For a variety of reasons, primarily changes in national priorities, the revision public involvement process was “put on hold” for the past year. The initial round of public involvement meetings is scheduled for November and December 2000, and January 2001. Public comments on the initial issues and concerns and the scope of the analysis will be most helpful if received by January 31, 2001. They should be submitted to the Forest Supervisor, Bighorn National Forest, 2013 East-side Second St., Sheridan, WY 82801. You can also e-mail comments to Mailroom R2 Bighorn@fs.fed.us.

The Bighorn underwent a significant amendment process between 1990 and 1994, in order to resolve conflicts in the 1985 Forest Plan between the allowable timber sale quantity and the standards and guidelines. While that amendment was never formally adopted, the sale quantity was administratively capped in 1995 by the Regional Forester. One of the benefits of the amendment process was that a large amount of public input was gathered about issues and concerns with the 1985 Plan, and that input was used, in conjunction with our annual Forest Plan monitoring, to identify five major revision topics. These topics may be updated based upon the issues generated at the public meetings. The initial revision topics include:

This is a revision of an existing Forest Plan. We will keep what is working, and revise those areas that need to be updated.

- Biological Diversity
- Timber Suitability and Management of Forested Lands
- Roadless Area Allocation and Management
- Special Areas (such as Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Research Natural Areas)
- Travel and Recreation Management.

The five major topics are broad categories that include many “subcategories”. For example, biological diversity will include fire management planning, wildlife, range, riparian, just to name a few. The subcategories are discussed in the Notice of Intent. The entire 9 page Notice of Intent can be found at the Forest Plan website, at www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/elec_rr.htm#fp. Information on the Plan is there, as well as an e-mail address for comments and questions.

In addition to the website, there are many other ways for the landowners of the Bighorn National Forest to become involved and get information. Public field trips will be held this summer on the mountain. People are encouraged to invite Forest Plan team members to address their groups, either on the Forest Plan process in general, or about specific topics of interest to the group. As always, your comments and questions on any Forest topic are welcome – please feel free to call or visit your local Forest Service offices in Buffalo, Lovell, Sheridan and Worland.

What is Forest Plan Revision?

The Bighorn National Forest was created in 1898, and has been managed for a variety of uses. In the beginning, the primary objectives of National Forest management were, "...to improve and protect the Forest, ...securing favorable conditions for water flows, ...to furnish a continuous supply of timber...". Managers of the Bighorn NF have been making land use planning decisions ever since that time.

The "modern" era of National Forest land use planning began with the passage of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). NFMA requires development of Forest Plans that take an integrated approach in considering the physical, biological, economic, and social resources. Plans must provide for multiple use and sustained yield, and must consider recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife, fish and wilderness. Processes for determining lands suited for timber production, and what the timber harvest levels should be, are also described in NFMA. Nationally, the first Forest Plans were completed in the early 1980's. On the Bighorn, analysis and public involvement work in the early 1980's resulted in the 1985 Forest Plan.

NFMA allows for amendments or revisions if necessary, and requires that Plans be revised at least every 15 years. The amendment process is designed to keep the plan current as resource or social conditions change.

One of the lessons learned from the first round of Forest Plans is that conditions *do* change. While some revisions have taken 7 or more years to complete, the Bighorn is working on a three year revision schedule, for two reasons. First, it is likely that the social, and sometimes the physical, resource conditions will change over that period of time, so analysis and alternative work done at the beginning is out of date by the time of the decision. Second, since things change, we would like to be more efficient with taxpayers money, spending less time up front doing the planning, and more time on implementation and monitoring.

The Bighorn is working on a three year revision schedule. Monitoring and adaptive management will be important components of the revised Plan.

So, the Bighorn is at the NFMA mandated time for revision - just what does that involve? There are six primary tasks:

1. Establish Goals and Desired Conditions

A recent survey of Johnson County residents concluded that "Utilizing the resources of the Bighorn National Forest to enhance economic stability in local, rural communities was a primary focus mentioned by nearly

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What is Forest Plan Revision?, continued

all the [National Forest landowners]. While the degree and type of resource use varied from tourist and recreational development, to ranching and timber production, all the [landowners] were concerned with conserving the resources found in the Bighorn National Forest.” We all agree on goals such as maintaining soil productivity and improving water quality; providing a wide variety of recreation opportunities; and, in providing a sustained flow of market and non-market products that help support local communities. Of course, there are usually many ways to achieve those objectives, and this is where the controversy often occurs.

2. Establish Standards and Guidelines

The revised Plan will make a distinction between standards and guidelines (S&Gs), while the existing Plan does not. Standards are means to achieve goals and objectives; they are firm direction. Deviation from a standard will require an amendment to the Plan. Guidelines are suggested means, and deviation from a guideline for project implementation will require documentation in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision document. The challenge during Forest Planning is to establish S&Gs that are compatible with each other and consistent. For example, the level of wildlife habitat protection envisioned must be achievable with the level of recreation, grazing and timber desired. Most of the project planning, such as for individual timber sales or other projects, largely revolves around compliance with the Forest Plan S&Gs.

3. Establish Management Areas and Management Area Direction

This is probably the most powerful part of the Forest Plan. This is where geographic areas are delineated on the map indicating how specific areas of the Forest should be managed. Areas of the Forest will be allocated to emphasize different uses, such as wildlife habitat, timber management, or recreation. This is where multiple use tradeoffs are made. Standards and guidelines play an important role here - while recreation management may be the emphasis for an area, the S&Gs provide minimum levels of protection for other resource uses. This process is very similar to county zoning. Citizens understand that various land uses, from residential to industrial, are desired in the proper place, and after public involvement, the proper places are established through zoning ordinances.

4. Designate Land Suitable for Timber Harvest and Establish the Allowable Sale Quantity

NFMA and other laws require that land managed for timber production have suitable soils and adequate regeneration capability. The allowable sale quantity (ASQ), or maximum timber harvest level, must also be compatible with the other land use allocations and standards and guidelines established in previous steps.

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What is Forest Plan Revision?, continued

5. Make Wilderness, Wild and Scenic River, and Research Natural Area Recommendations

While it takes an act of Congress to designate Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers, and approval of the Chief of the Forest Service to designate Research Natural Areas, Forest Planning is the process for considering how these special designations fit into the overall land allocation picture.

6. Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Requirements

One of the main points of ecosystem management is adapting to social, economic and resource changes. We learned from the 1985 Bighorn Forest Plan that things change, or that assumptions made in developing the plan were inadequate. For example, during the implementation of the 1985 Forest Plan we found that the standards and guidelines were not compatible with the ASQ. In addition, there have been major technological, social, and political changes since the early 1980's, and major natural events occurred, such as the 12,000 acre Lost Fire. The monitoring and evaluation requirements are essential to detecting which changes should result in amendments or revisions to the Forest Plan. Adaptive management is a central tenet of the NFMA process, in that while Plans look to the future from a land use perspective, they are "living" documents that are intended to adapt to changes in the resource and social environments.

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Bighorn National Forest

2013 East Side Second St.
Sheridan, WY 82801

Phone: 307-674-2600

Fax: 307-674-2668

Email: Mailroom R2 Bighorn@fs.fed.us



We're on the Web!
www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn



Times have changed since this Forest Ranger Examination in 1907. Help plan for the future of the Bighorn National Forest by getting involved in the Revision of the Forest Plan!
